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“THOU SHALT NOT KILL A TREE”: GREEK, MANICHAEAN AND INDIAN TALES

In Book Eight of the *Metamorphoses*, written during the first decade of the Christian era, Ovid retells the Greek tale of impious Erysichthon, a despiser of Demeter who cut down the sacred tree of the goddess and was punished with insatiable hunger. Ovid's story may suitably be recalled in Sir James Frazer's congenial paraphrase:¹

Ovid himself in another passage has recorded the sad case of an aged oak which grew in a holy grove. Its gnarled trunk was girt with many a ribbon, many a wreath, and many a tablet hung by pious hands, and often round its bole the Dryad nymphs, hand linked in hand, danced in a ring. But the wicked prince Erysichthon was no respecter of trees and the tree-nymphs. He ordered his servants to cut down the old oak, and when they hung back he snatched the axe from one of them and cried that if the goddess herself were in the tree he would bring it with its leafy top crashing to the ground. At the dreadful words the tree groaned aloud, its green leaves turned pale, and a deathlike pallor stole over the boughs; and when the axe cut into the trunk, blood flowed from the wound.² Undeterred by these ominous symptoms, the bold, bad man redoubled his blows, till the stately oak was felled and in its fall drew many trees to the ground. Grieved at the death of their sister, the Dryad nymphs, in mourning robes of sable hue, appealed to Ceres, the goddess of the grove, who inflicted exemplary punishment on the sinner.

1 J.G. Frazer, *The Fasti of Ovid*, vol. III (1929) 225 f. Frazer quotes *Metam.* 8.738 ff. in connection with *Fasti* 4.231 f. *naida vulneribus succidit in arbore factis, / illa perit: fatum naidos arbor erat.*

2 *Metam.* 8.760 ff. *cuius ut in trunco fecit manus impia vulnus, / haud aliter fluxit discusso cortice sanguis, / quam solet, ante aras ingens ubi victima taurus / concidit, abrupta cruor e cervice profundus.* Virgil's miracle story of Polydorus has often been compared, especially *Aen.* 3.33 *ater et alterius sequitur de cortice sanguis* (blood coming from the broken stems of myrtle and cornel shoots).

Frazer omitted two interesting details which will occupy us later. At the first sight of blood, one of Erysichthon's servants tried to stop him, only to have his head cut off. Finally, the dying tree delivered a sinister message (*Metam.* 8.770 ff.):

"I am the nymph who is hidden in this tree, and very dear to Demeter. While dying I predict that you will soon be punished for your deed and atone for my death."

If we knew nothing else about the story of Erysichthon's crime, it would not be difficult to imagine how this pious tale might have originated in actual cult. Sacred groves harboring trees that could not be felled or used for timber and firewood were a familiar feature of Greek religion;³ cult-laws from the late classical and Hellenistic periods impose heavy penalties on trespassers.⁴ In earlier times, before fines were collected, would-be violators will have been deterred not by threats of legal action but by the prospect of a much more severe penalty exacted by the spirit who inhabited the tree, or by the deity who protected it.⁵ Edifying stories about mythical violators and their exemplary punishment will have served as vivid illustrations of the tree's sacred status and the god's power. Because of their antiquity, such stories did not survive in their pristine form as true cult

3 The *locus classicus* is the Homeric *Hymn to Aphrodite* 264–272, esp. 267 f. (belief in tree-nymphs who die with their trees as the rationale for sacred groves) *τεμένη δέ ἐ* [i.e. the trees of the tree-nymphs] *κικλήσκουσιν / ἀθανάτων· τὰς δ' οὐ τι βροτοὶ κείρουσι σιδήρῳ*.

4 Frazer (above, n. 1) III 351 f. For a list of relevant inscriptions, see F. Sokolowski, *Lois sacrées des cités grecques. Supplément* (Paris 1962) 142 f. on no. 81; *Lois sacrées des cités grecques* (Paris 1969) nos. 37 and 150. An Athenian law apparently still in existence in the early 4th century B.C. imposed the death penalty on citizens who violated one of Athena's sacred olive-trees (Aristotle, *Ath. Pol.* 60.2; cf. Lysias *or.* 7); non-citizens fell under the curse of the goddess (Istros *FGrHist* 334 F 30; cf. Androtion 324 F 39).

5 The Greeks tended to dissociate the soul which animated the tree from its seat and to regard it as a separate anthropomorphic demon, especially a tree-nymph. By substituting local gods of wider appeal such as Demeter, Zeus, Asclepius or Apollo for the anonymous and undifferentiated tree-sprites, the polis-religion eventually absorbed the tree cult. This explains why the grove of the tree-nymphs is named after, and protected by, higher deities in the *Hymn to Aphrodite* 267 f. (above, n. 3). The coexistence of tree-nymphs and Demeter in the story of Erysichthon, which has puzzled some modern scholars, therefore reflects the practice of actual cult: Demeter owns the trees, but the nymphs inhabit them. The identity of nymph and tree is of course conceptually prior to their connection with Demeter, or with any other deity (a point rightly made by W. Mannhardt, *Wald- und Feldkulte. II. Antike Wald- und Feldkulte aus nordeuropäischer Überlieferung erläutert* [2nd ed., Berlin 1905] 8–14, in his discussion of the Erysichthon story).

legends but only in later secularized redactions from the hands of poets and mythographers.⁶

I. Source Criticism—An Exercise in Frustration

Ovid's source for the Erysichthon story was literary, not cultic. In Ovid's immediate model, Callimachus' *Hymn to Demeter*, the Alexandrian poet assumes the role of pious women who listen to sacred tales while waiting for the evening-star and the procession that carries Demeter's ritual basket. After brief mention of the Eleusinian cult legend and of the Athenian propaganda myth of Demeter and Triptolemus who brought civilization through agriculture,⁷ Callimachus goes on to retell the story of Erysichthon as a warning to others (*Cer.* 22–117). His description of the actual “Strafwunder” is a masterpiece of dramatic narrative.

Twenty lumbermen led by Erysichthon invaded the sacred grove of Demeter on the Thessalian plain of Dotion to cut timber for a new dining-hall. Their first target was a giant poplar tree, a favorite haunt of the tree-nymphs. The wounded tree's moaning alerted the goddess (39–41):

ἃ πράτα πλαγείσα κακὸν μέλος ἔαχεν ἄλλαις.
40 ἄσθετο Δαμάττηρ, ὅτι οἱ ξύλον ἱερὸν ἄλγει,
εἶπε δὲ χωσαμένα: ‘τίς μοι καλὰ δένδρεα κόπτει;’

6 The story of Paraibios illustrates the maxim “Do not hurt a sacred tree” (Ap. Rhod. 2.476–483): Paraibios' father while felling trees was asked by a hamadryad μὴ ταμείην πρέμνον δρυὸς ἡλικός. He cut down the tree regardless, and the nymph cursed him and his offspring so that Paraibios was afflicted with poverty. Two other stories involving tree-nymphs promise intercourse with the nymph as a reward for saving her tree: Arkas saved a tree which was about to be swept away by a torrent (Eumelos fr. 15 Kinkel); the Cnidian Rhoikos saw a decrepit tree in Nineveh and propped it up to save its life (schol. Ap. Rhod. 2.476/83a = Charon *FGrHist* 262 F 12; schol. Theocr. 3.13c, listed for no good reason as Pindar fr. 262 by Snell and Maehler). Poplars, the metamorphosed Heliades, were particularly vulnerable; in an Hellenistic epigram ascribed to Antipater (*A.P.* 9.706), an αἰγυριος warns would-be violators: δένδρεον ἱερὸν εἰμι· παρερχόμενός με φυλάσσειν / πημαίνειν· ἀλγῶ, ξεῖνε, κολουμένη. ... εἰ δὲ περιδρύψῃς με παρατραπὴν περ' εὐδῶσαν, / δακρύσεις· μέλομαι καὶ ξύλον Ἥελίω. (For the close thematic connection between this poem and Callimachus, *Hymn to Demeter* 37 ff. [quoted below], see K.J. McKay, *Erysichthon: A Callimachean Comedy* [Leiden 1962] 80 f.)

7 Callimachus seems to have followed the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* for the Eleusinian myth (N.J. Richardson, *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter* [Oxford 1974] 69). Thanks to the new Praises of Isis from Maroneia, we are now in a better position to envisage the Attic sources which inspired Callimachus in vv. 18 and 21 (on Demeter Thesmophoros and Triptolemus; cf. lines 29–31 and 36–38 of the Maroneia inscription, ed. Y. Grandjean, *Une nouvelle arétalogie d'Isis à Maronée*, EPRO 49 [Leiden 1975]).

Disguised as her own priestess, Demeter begged Erysichthon to desist. But he would not listen, and threatened to use his axe on her. Outraged, Demeter revealed her true divine form, her head touching the sky. The lumbermen panicked, dropped their axes and fled. Demeter spared them but afflicted Erysichthon with wasting hunger.⁸

With characteristic ingenuity, Ovid added color and realism to the miracle which he found in Callimachus. In Callimachus, Erysichthon threatens to kill Demeter's priestess; in Ovid, he spills human blood before he murders the tree-nymph. In Ovid, the nymph is not merely a visitor of the tree, but identical with it; when hurt, Ovid's tree-nymph not only feels pain but actually sheds blood. In fact so felicitous is Ovid's decision to portray the dying nymph rather than the dying tree that some scholars, struck by its effect, have come to regard Ovid's version as a more authentic rendering of the underlying religious sentiment.⁹ This is doubtless true, as long as one remembers that Ovid succeeded by sheer power of imagination: his dying tree-nymph seems to have been an *ad hoc* invention, the product of poetic genius stirred by a particular and familiar religious concept.¹⁰ But in making the tree come truly alive, Ovid recreated genuine religious beliefs—how genuine, we shall see presently—widely held around the Mediterranean before and, under special circumstances, even after the poet's lifetime.

Let us briefly return to Callimachus. What was his source for the Erysichthon story? A recent critic, noted for his own opinions, suggested flatly that the story of Erysichthon's sacrilege is Callimachus' own

8 The different treatment, often discussed, of Erysichthon's hunger in Ovid (who follows the Mestra story of the Hesiodic *Catalogue*) and in Callimachus (whose main source of inspiration here was his own sense of humor) is irrelevant to my purpose. The folktale of hungry Erysichthon and versatile Mestra on the one hand, and the aretology of impious Erysichthon and vindictive Demeter on the other hand, are combined first in Lycophron (*Alex.* 1388–1396) and next in Ovid. In my opinion, both stories were independent myths originally. Death by starvation as a punishment inflicted, appropriately, by Demeter appears elsewhere (at the beginning of speech VI in the *Corpus Lysiacum*); hunger as a folktale motif and as the result of divine intervention connects the two Erysichthon stories, and will have served as an incentive to combine both in a single tale.

9 W. Mannhardt, *Wald- und Feldkulte* II (above, n. 5) 8 ff. esp. 12 (who went so far as to identify the bleeding of the tree as an integral part of the "original" tale as found by Ovid in a pre-Callimachean poetical source, and was severely criticized by Wilamowitz, *Hell. Dichtung* II 34 f. and 43 n. 2); H.J. Rose, *A Handbook of Greek Mythology* (5th ed., London 1953) 95 (who thought that the death of a nymph explained Demeter's role better than the cutting down of a tree), cited with approval by D. Fehling (below, n. 11) 180 n. 37.

10 For parallels, see above nn. 1–3. Compare Dryope plucking lotus-flowers, the transformation of the nymph Lotis, who bleeds and trembles when plucked (*Metam.* 9.344 f.).

invention.¹¹ On this assumption, Callimachus’ only source would have been the Mestra episode of the Hesiodic *Ehoiai* which provided the Alexandrian poet with the folktale motif of Erysichthon’s insatiable hunger. In the words of that scholar,¹²

Was wäre charakteristischer, als dass Kallimachos in einer vorhandenen Erzählung eine Lücke suchte? Er hat nach der Ursache des prodigiösen Hungers gefragt und sie natürlicherweise einen Frevel gegen eine Gottheit sein lassen. Das Fällen des heiligen Baumes halte ich für eine willkürlich gewählte Möglichkeit; die Vorstellung als solche war geläufig.¹³ Unklar ist die Begründung, mit der er es auf Demeter bezog; erst Ovid hat das hübsche Motiv, dass die Göttin der Nahrung den Hunger verhängt.

Callimachus as the author of a sacred tale of his own making?¹⁴ Or as the self-appointed herald of divine punishment arbitrarily blamed on Demeter? There is no such Callimachus. The poet whom we know was extremely scrupulous in his treatment of myth; he never allowed himself to tell an unrecorded story. We have his own word for it: ἀμάρτυρον οὐδὲν αἰείδω (fr. 612 Pfeiffer).¹⁵ But Callimachus rarely reveals his sources, which as a rule are known to us only indirectly through chance references in later authors, or more often, remain unknown.

A famous exception is, of course, Xenomedes of Ceus, Callimachus’ authority for Acontius and Cydippe (fr. 75, 53 ff.),

ἐνθεν ὁ παιδός
μῦθος ἐς ἡμετέραν ἔδραμε Καλλιόπην

(fr. 75, 76 f.).

Elsewhere, in the story of Tiresias who lost his eyesight because he offended Athena unwittingly, Callimachus repeats a traditional myth but does not say where he found it (*Lav. Pall.* 56),

μῦθος δ’ οὐκ ἐμός, ἀλλ’ ἐτέρων.

11 D. Fehling, “Erysichthon oder das Märchen von der mündlichen Überlieferung,” *RhM* 115 (1972) 173–196. Fehling has shown that the modern Greek version of the Erysichthon story as told on the island of Cos is a 19th century compilation from Callimachus and from Planudes’ translation of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. F. Bömer, the most recent commentator on *Metam.* VIII (Heidelberg 1977), accepts Fehling’s conclusion; so do I.

12 Fehling 178.

13 Fehling refers to *h. Ven.* 268 (quoted above, n. 3).

14 Callimachus would have had to explain his choice of Demeter if he had invented the story. In reality the connection was not only traditional (above, n. 5) but based on the existence of a sacred grove in a specific sanctuary of Demeter, presumably that in Cnidus (below, n. 19).

15 Cf. R. Pfeiffer, *History of Classical Scholarship* (Oxford 1968) 125 f.

The mythological handbook ascribed to Apollodorus remedies Callimachus' silence by assigning the same myth to Pherecydes of Athens, who was clearly the source for Callimachus.¹⁶ Not omitting the slightest detail, Callimachus follows Pherecydes all the way to the very end of the story where Athena tries to make up for the misery that she has caused and predicts the future fate of Tiresias (*Lav. Pall.* 125–130):

125 πολλὰ δὲ Βοιωτοῖσι θεοπρόπα, πολλὰ δὲ Κάδμῳ
 χρησέϊ, καὶ μεγάλοις ὕστερα Λαβδακίδαῖς.
 δωσῶ καὶ μέγα βάκτρον, ὃ οἱ πόδας ἐς δέον ἄξει,
 δωσῶ καὶ βιότῳ τέρμα πολυχρόνιον,
 καὶ μόνος, εὖτε θάνῃ, πεπνυμένος ἐν νεκέεσσι
 130 φοιτασεῖ, μεγάλῳ τίμιος Ἀγεσίλῃ.

The prophet's magical staff which guides his steps comes straight from Pherecydes; his longevity was mentioned in the *Melampodia* (Hes. frs. 275–276 M.-W.); his association with Cadmus recalls the *Bacchae*, the only known play in which Tiresias antedates the generation of Laius and Oedipus, his chief clients elsewhere in Attic tragedy; and finally, Tiresias' exceptional role among the dead is, of course, a verbatim reference to the Homeric Nekyia (κ 494 f., λ 91). This summary analysis of a well-attested myth, and of its treatment by Callimachus, may serve as a reminder that Callimachus took pleasure in reproducing earlier mythical tradition faithfully. It follows that where we cannot control him, it is safer to assume the existence of a particular source now lost than to credit him with an innovation in which he would have taken no pride.

Although Callimachus' model is lost, its narrative character as preserved by him is sufficiently clear, and suggests that the story of Erysichthon and Demeter, whatever Callimachus' direct source, had first been told in one of the sanctuaries of Demeter. Wilamowitz, with customary insight, saw that the Callimachus of the *Hymn to Demeter* is posing as an *aretalogos*, or religious storyteller, and that his version of the Erysichthon story is in fact formally an aretalogy. His analysis, unduly neglected, repays attention:¹⁷

16 *Bibl.* 3 (70) 6.7.2–3 = Pherecydes *FGrHist* 3 F 92a. Fehling (above, n. 11) 184 n. 51 denies that the reference to Pherecydes (demonstrably a major source for *Bibl.*) is correct and postulates Callimachus as the source summarized in *Bibl.* This self-serving procedure requires no comment. H. Herter (*RE Suppl.* 13 [1973] 240) has quietly reinstated Pherecydes (whose name appears in connection with the Tiresias myth not only in *Bibl.* but independently also in schol. Hamb. κ 493 p. 782 Dindorf = *FGrHist* 3 F 92b).

17 *Reden und Vorträge* (4th ed., Berlin 1925) 246 f.; similarly 258 ("das erbauliche Mirakel des Aretalogen"); cf. *Hellenistische Dichtung* (Berlin 1924) I 182 and II 26.

Es verlohnt sich, die Form des Gedichtes scharf ins Auge zu fassen. Ich befürchte zwar nicht, dass meine Leser so stumpf sein werden, alles übrige nur als Rahmen für die Geschichte von Erysichthon anzusehen; aber sie nimmt doch so viel Raum ein und ist dabei so gehalten, dass man sie nicht ohne weiteres als Ausdruck für die Unterhaltungen der wartenden Frauen auffassen kann. Man muss hinzunehmen, dass in einem Gedichte zu Ehren der Göttin, nach antiker Terminologie einem Hymnus, eine Erzählung unbedingt verlangt ward, in der sich die Macht und Majestät, die *ἀρετή*, der Göttin offenbarte. Und weiter muss man hinzunehmen, dass in der Tat an den Festen Erzähler auftraten, die sich sogar danach nannten, dass sie die Wunderwirkungen der göttlichen Majestät vortrugen, Aretalogen. Kallimachos nun hat wirklich eine solche Geschichte aufgegriffen, und sein Publikum, an die Erscheinungen des Lebens gewöhnt, nahm dann keinen Anstoss an der breiten Erzählung. Dabei hat er sich geflissentlich eine Geschichte ausgesucht, in der das unaufhörliche Fressen und das Verhungern ihm wie uns im Grunde höchst unerquicklich und unappetitlich war, und es versteht sich von selbst, dass er das Wunder nicht eben viel anders ansah als wir den für Kinder auch heilsam gruseligen Suppenkaspar; Aretaloge ist am Ende gleichbedeutend mit einem aufdringlichen Salbader geworden.

Callimachus turned Erysichthon's divinely sent hunger into a secular farce. But throughout the miracle story proper, he followed the familiar aretalogical pattern of the "Strafwunder" which has close structural parallels in the Homeric *Hymn to Dionysus* and in the Delian Sarapis aretalogy of the late third century B.C.¹⁸ In all three aretalogies, the wicked violate the sphere of a particular god, and receive due punishment, while those present at the scene are filled with terror or wonder as they witness divine power in action. More specifically, both in the *Homeric Hymn* and in Callimachus, the one believer and his voice of caution are disregarded by the *theomachos*, and the divine portents go unheeded. Callimachus' aretalogy strikes one as archaic rather than Hellenistic, and its source, like Ovid's, will have been literary rather than cultic. A similar tale was told of Triopas,¹⁹ Erysichthon's father, whose ultimate home was Cnidus. Most miracle stories were attached to particular shrines. Cnidus with its famous sanctuary of Demeter may well have been the original "Sitz im Leben" for the old-fashioned aretalogy of Demeter and Erysichthon.

18 On the inscription from Delos, see H. Engelmann, *The Delian Aretalogy of Sarapis*, EPRO 44 (Leiden 1975); A.D. Nock, *Conversion* (Oxford 1933) 50 ff. The impious sailors turned dolphins are, of course, duly recorded by Propertius (3.17), the self-proclaimed *aretalogos* of Dionysus (cf. Henrichs, *HSCP* 82 [1978] 205 f.).

19 By Diodorus, Marcellus of Side and Hyginus the astronomer (for references and discussion, see Wilamowitz, *Hell. Dichtung* II 37 ff.; all three authors are independent of Callimachus, *pace* Fehling [above, n. 11] 181 f.). The sacrilege of Triopas, or Erysichthon, is invariably located in Thessaly, whence the family is said to have moved to the Cnidian promontory named after Triopas (Callimachus, Lycophron and Diodorus). The place where an aretalogy was told need not be identical with the place where the miracle happened.

The story of Erysichthon's crime is the best illustration of the concept of the tree-nymph and of trees as animate that has come down to us from Greco-Roman antiquity. Callimachus saved it from oblivion, and Ovid revived its true spirit. Recently equally vivid tales about tree-souls have come to light in an unexpected source. They invite comparison with Ovid, and raise new questions that will lead us far away from Rome and Alexandria.

II. Tree-Murder in Manichaeism

The Cologne Mani Codex (*CMC*) preserves fragments of two miracle stories in which a date palm that is about to be pruned threatens revenge, and vegetables that are being harvested start to bleed.²⁰ These stories were told in order to illustrate the Manichaean doctrine of the "Living Soul" which regards all organic matter as animate and the universal soul which animates it as inviolable.²¹ In the eyes of the most devout Manichees, the elect, robbing a tree of its branches, or cutting cabbage, was tantamount to committing murder.²² A Manichee who hurt the soul of a tree or vegetable by hurting the plant would suffer metempsychosis into the same kind of plant.²³

The hero of both stories is the young Mani who lived in a community of Jewish-Christian baptists in southern Babylonia from A.D. 220 to 240.²⁴

20 A. Henrichs and L. Koenen, *ZPE* 19 (1975) 1–85 (edition of *CMC* 1,1–72,7), *ZPE* 32 (1978) 87–199 (edition of *CMC* 72,8 – 99,9).

21 H.-Ch. Puech, *Le Manichéisme. Son fondateur, sa doctrine* (Paris 1949) 85 ff.; Henrichs and Koenen, *ZPE* 32 (1978) nn. 258, 268, 273, 275, 284 and 296.

22 Augustine, *Enarr. in Psalmos* 140.12 (PL 37, 1823), who uses the phrase *falsa homicidia*; *Contra Faustum* 16.28 (CSEL 25, 473, 24 ff.) *a vobis autem quisquis vulserit spicas, non ex traditione Christi, qui hanc innocentiam vocat [Matth. 12.7], sed ex traditione Manichaei homicida deputatur*; *De haer.* 46 (PL 42, 37) *animas auditorum suorum in electos revolvi arbitrantur, aut feliciore compendio in escas electorum suorum, ut iam inde purgatae in nulla corpora revertantur. caeteras autem animas et in pecora redire putant et in omnia quae radicibus fixa sunt atque aluntur in terra. herbas enim atque arbores sic putant vivere, ut vitam, quae illis inest, et sentire credant et dolere, cum laeduntur: nec aliquid inde sine cruciatu eorum quemquam posse vellere aut carpere. propter quod agrum etiam spinis purgare nefas habent. unde agriculturam, quae omnium artium est innocentissima, tanquam plurium homicidiorum ream dementer accusant*; *Contra Faustum* 6.4 (CSEL 25, 288, 22 ff.) *vos autem ... expectatis, quis auditorum vestrorum propter vos pascendos cultello vel falcicula armatus in hortum prosiliat, homicida cucurbitarum, quarum vobis adferat, mirum dictu, viva cadavera*. Cf. *ZPE* 19 (1975) 13 n. 21; L. Koenen, *Illinois Classical Studies* 3 (1978) 176 ff.

23 *Acta Archelai* 10.1–8 Beeson = Epiphanius, *Pan.* 66.28; Augustine, *De moribus Manichaeorum* 17.55 (PL 32.1369) *nam et revolutionem hominis in arborem notum est vos, id est auctorem ipsum vestrum, pro ingenti poena, non tamen pro summa, solere minitari*; *De haer.* 46 (see preceding note).

24 Henrichs, *HSCP* 77 (1973) 43 ff.; 83 (1979, forthcoming).

According to the first story,²⁵ a baptist climbed onto a palm tree to collect wood for his use while Mani was waiting on the ground. Suddenly the tree began to talk, asking Mani for help: “If you protect me from this pain, you will not die with the man who is trying to kill me.” Struck with fear, the baptist got down in a hurry, prostrated himself before Mani, and said: “I did not know that this secret mystery is with you.” He was even more amazed when Mani told him that *all* plants possess speech. “Guard this mystery,” the baptist warned Mani. “Reveal it to no one, lest he become envious and kill you.”

The second story²⁶ relates how Mani refused to go and get vegetables from one of the gardens which the vegetarian baptists cultivated. But when one of them went himself to the garden, the vegetables lamented “like human beings, and, as it were, like children.” When they were cut by his sickle, “blood streamed down” from the place where they had been hurt. Again, the baptist was awestruck and fell down before Mani.

A third story,²⁷ though by a different author and not about Mani, also centers around a palm tree endowed with speech, whose harvest of dates had been picked by a thief. Threatened with extinction by its owner, the date palm pleaded not to be cut down and promised to replace the lost fruit. In a message to the thief, the tree warned: “If you come (again), I will hurl you down from my height so that you will die.”

The *CMC* is basically a Life of Mani translated into Greek from a lost Eastern Aramaic original. Mani’s native language was Aramaic, in which he wrote all his works, with the exception of the Middle Persian *Šābuhragān*. But the original writings are virtually lost, and the vast majority of extant fragments are translations into Iranian dialects and now into Greek. The *CMC*, though once removed from Mani’s own words, puts us therefore in very close touch, if not always with Mani himself, then at least with authentic and very early Manichaean tradition.

Students of Manichaeism will welcome the new stories from the *CMC* as authentic illustrations of a central Manichaean belief. Their existence could have been surmised from allusions in Augustine, himself a Manichee for many years, who heard or read similar Manichaean tales but did not quote them verbatim. In his *Confessions*, for instance, he admits to having been led so deeply into error as to believe “that a fig when plucked would shed milky tears, as would its mother-tree.”²⁸ Now, after the discovery of

25 *CMC* 6,1 – 8,14.

26 *CMC* 9,1 – 10,15.

27 *CMC* 98,9 – 99,9. Unlike the other two stories, this is not a Manichaean legend but a Manichaean adaptation of an earlier story which originated in the agrarian milieu of Mani’s baptists.

28 *Conf.* 3.10.18 perductus ad eas nugas ut crederem ficum plorare cum decerpitur et matrem eius arborem lacrimis lacteis.

the *CMC*, we too can read the kind of stories which Augustine had in mind. Their graphic realism as well as their occurrence in a description of Mani's upbringing makes it virtually certain that the first two stories originated with Mani himself. As a missionary of his new creed, Mani liked to appeal not only to the ears but also to the eyes of his largely illiterate audiences; so he painted a picture book which illustrated his religious beliefs in colorful and graphic detail.²⁹ When depicting the primeval battle between the forces of Light and Darkness in his book-paintings, Mani will have set stark white against pitch-black colors; and to speculate further about Mani's *Biblia Pauperum*, I suggest that on its pages red blood was dripping from the fresh cuts in green plants.

Not many stories illustrating tree-souls have survived from antiquity. Because of their rarity, the new specimens are also of interest within the larger context of Mediterranean religions in general. Mani grew up in Southern Babylonia, at the crossroads of East and West. He had a remarkable genius for adapting diverse traditions of widely different origins to form a new syncretistic religion of great coherence and longevity. Hardly anything in it can be traced back to a single source; everything Mani thought and wrote was the result of multiple cultural fusions that went on in his own mind, and in his environment. Our stories are no exception. The basic notion which inspired them, that of a tree-soul or plant-soul as part of a belief in metempsychosis, could have reached him through Greek or Indian channels, or both. Again, some narrative features of Mani's stories, such as the miracle of the talking tree, have close parallels in Jewish tradition, with which Mani was familiar through his upbringing in a Jewish-Christian sect. For other details, including the blood, the revenge threatened by the tree, the basic aretalogical pattern of the first two stories, and key elements of their phraseology, the closest analogues can be found in Greco-Roman texts, and nowhere else.

Before we can attempt to sort out the various traditions that may have influenced Mani's tales, an alternative possibility must be briefly considered. Is it conceivable that Mani owed his stories to no one, and that he simply made them up? The question is legitimate. Mani's imagination and mythopoeic genius easily matched Ovid's. And yet neither of them created completely *ex nihilo*; rather, they both elaborated traditional material, on which they left their own unique imprint. I would therefore assume, as a matter of principle, that Mani's animated trees did have non-Manichaean ancestors.

29 Mani's "Picture" (*Εἰκὼν*) is mentioned in Parthian, Coptic and Chinese texts; it was very popular with New Persian writers, who call Mani invariably "Mani the Painter." Cf. G. Flügel, *Mani, seine Lehre und seine Schriften* (Leipzig 1862) 382 ff.; Henning in G. Haloun and W.B. Henning, *Asia Major* 3 (1953) 209 f.

In human genealogies, the most distant and shadowy forebears are often considered the most venerable. In the reconstruction of historico-literary relationships, however, a recent and well-attested ancestor is much more valuable than one whose existence is open to doubt. Historians of religion will want to find out about the immediate models of Mani's tree stories, whether Greek, Jewish or Indian. But 19th century comparative theorists looked for more remote antecedents, and they found them in the tree-souls and tree-spirits of universal belief. Their approach had the merit of making sense for the first time of the scattered references to Manichaeian tree-souls and plant-souls in Augustine and elsewhere, and of suggesting a common frame of reference for Ovidian tree-nymphs and Manichaeian tree-souls.

III. Tree-Souls and Animism

The new Manichaeian stories, like their Ovidian counterpart, assume that trees or plants bleed when injured and that they can communicate with man, in one word, that they are animate. A century ago, in the heyday of E.B. Tylor, the father of animism, such stories would have fallen on willing ears. Tylor sought to explain the vast variety of religious customs documented by ethnology from a universal belief in the animateness of man's natural environment, including animals, trees, rivers, and even inanimate objects.³⁰ His all-inclusive theory enabled Tylor to treat the tree-nymphs of Ovidian transformation myths in conjunction with the Manichaeian transmigration of souls into plants. As a comparatist, he saw and stressed the similarity between the souls of the Manichaeian auditors which “would pass into melons and cucumbers, to finish their purification by being eaten by the elect,”³¹ and “the sorrowing sisters of Phaethon who changed into trees, yet still dropping blood and crying for mercy when their shoots are torn.”³² For Tylor, the torments of the tree-spirits in the *Metamorphoses*, including the violence committed against them by Erysichthon,³³ and the suffering of the souls in Manichaeism were related phenomena: in both cases, “savage animism” survived in modified form, under the respective masks of myth and theology.

30 E.B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture* (1871; 6th ed., London 1920) chs. XI–XVII. On tree-souls in particular, see *Prim. Cult.* I 474–476, II 214–229. Augustine, *Contra Adimantum* 22 (CSEL 25, 181, 27 f.) cum talem *animam arboris* esse credant (sc. Manichaei) qualem hominis, foreshadows Tylor's “tree-soul” and Mannhardt's (below, n. 38) “Baumseele.”

31 *Prim. Cult.* II 14 f. Cf. Augustine, *Contra Faustum* 5.10 (CSEL 25, 283, 6 ff.) aut si melioris meriti sunt (sc. auditores), in melones et cucumeres vel in aliquos alios cibos veniant, quos vos manducaturi estis, ut vestris ructatibus cito purgentur.

32 *Prim. Cult.* II 220. Cf. *Metam.* 2.359 ff. esp. 362 nostrum laceratur in arbore corpus. On the Heliades, see above, n. 6.

33 *Prim. Cult.* II 227.

Tylor's views are widely frowned upon today. For all their instructiveness, they tend to obscure such basic categories of historical understanding as time and place, and assume the "survival" of "primitive" thought-patterns without paying much attention to demonstrable connections between different cultures, or to historical continuity over long periods of time. But in his brief discussion of Manichaeian metempsychosis, Tylor proceeded with caution and insight, although he was ill-informed. For his information, he relied on Isaac de Beausobre's distinguished but antiquated *Histoire Critique de Manichée et du Manichéisme* of 1734 and 1739, and neglected F.C. Baur's superior work of 1831.³⁴ Whereas Beausobre had discredited the graphic references to plant-murder and plant-souls in the anti-Manichaeian *Acta Archelai* as unauthentic,³⁵ they made perfect theological sense to Baur, who saw a direct historical connection between Mani's concept of successive reincarnations of human souls into animals and plants on the one hand and similar Indian doctrines on the other hand.³⁶ Unlike Beausobre, Tylor accepted the account of Manichaeian metempsychosis in the *Acta Archelai* as well as similar allusions in Augustine as essentially genuine; like Baur, he suggested that they represented Manichaeian elaborations of Indian teachings.³⁷ His intuition, based on comparative evidence, was more than justified, and has been confirmed by the *CMC*. Tylor would not have been surprised to learn that the colorful details and narrative structure of the Manichaeian tree-stories in their original form show close affinities not only with Greco-Roman myths involving tree-souls but also with modern reports of agrarian customs in more distant parts of the world.

Barely a generation after Tylor, and much under his influence and that of Tylor's contemporary Wilhelm Mannhardt (whose two volumes of *Wald- und Feldkulte* appeared in 1875 and 1877),³⁸ J.G. Frazer enlarged

34 F.C. Baur, *Das manichäische Religionssystem nach den Quellen neu untersucht und entwickelt* (Tübingen 1831).

35 Beausobre I 250 f. ("De pareilles extravagances auroient révolté tout le Monde contre Manichée." But even an Augustine was impressed during nine long years.), II 496–499. On ch. X of the *Acta Archelai*, see above, n. 23 and below, n. 54.

36 Baur 252 ff. (on plant-murder), 317–321 (on Manichaeian metempsychosis), 440 (on Hindu and Buddhist reincarnation).

37 *Prim. Cult.* II 15.

38 W. Mannhardt, *Wald- und Feldkulte. Erster Band: Der Baumkultus der Germanen* (1875, 2nd ed. Berlin 1904) 5–71 ("Die Baumseele."), esp. 34–38 ("Verletzte Bäume bluten."). *Zweiter Band: Antike Wald- und Feldkulte aus nordeuropäischer Überlieferung erläutert* (1877, 2nd ed. Berlin 1905) 20–23 ("Die Baumseele.") In the original preface to the second volume (dated 1876), Mannhardt acknowledged a debt to Tylor for the concept of "Überlebsel [survivals] früherer Kulturstufen," but their work on tree-spirits, though often related, proceeded independently. Mannhardt nowhere mentions Manichaeian tree-souls; for his analysis of the Erysichthon myth, see above, n. 9.

both the conceptual framework and the material foundation for the comparative study of the tree-spirit. In Part I of the *Golden Bough*, under the title “The Worship of Trees,” Frazer amassed additional evidence illustrating the widespread belief in trees that talk and trees that bleed.³⁹ Of particular interest to us are stories reported from Malaya, Japan and Bulgaria, as well as from modern Sicily and Greece, in which trees are threatened by their owners in case they should fail to bear fruit; invariably, the trees reply either directly or through an intercessor, and promise: “Do not cut me down; I will soon bear fruit.”⁴⁰ The thematic connection between these reports and the similar story in the *CMC* about the palm tree whose fruit had been stolen is immediately obvious. But in this instance, geographical proximity points to common roots. The Manichaean version is demonstrably modeled on the Parable of the Barren Fig Tree in Luke 13.6–9 (where, however, the tree itself is not capable of speech); it is a reasonable inference that the Lukan parable exercised a similar influence on the modern versions reported from Greece and Sicily.

The comparative material sharpens our eye and broadens our understanding. But it does not throw any useful light on the proper place of the Manichaean stories in religious or literary history. Where are the origins for the Manichaean concept of the tree-soul, and which, if any, literary models shaped the miracle stories which illustrate that concept? These questions are now more urgent than ever, and we are in a somewhat better position to attempt an answer.

IV. Mani in India

In Manichaeism as well as in many other religious systems, animism and metempsychosis are inseparable. Their connection is so close that it would be wrong to ask which of the two concepts was foremost in Mani’s mind. The common principle which connects them in Manichaean eschatology is that of a cosmic “sympathy” or suffering of the divine substance (*anima*) which is dispersed throughout the material world. Manichaean metempsychosis is one of several mechanisms by which the universal *anima* is kept in constant motion until it becomes sufficiently separated from matter. As a byway along the Manichaean road to salvation, metempsychosis is suffered ordinarily by the second-rate Manichees, or auditors, and not by the elect. Whereas the souls of the elect achieve immediate salvation after death, those of the auditors must undergo a series of reincarnations commensurate with their deserts.

39 *The Golden Bough* (3rd ed., 1911) Part I (*The Magic Art*) vol. II, ch. IX, esp. 18–22.

40 Cf. A.B. Cook, *Zeus. A Study in Ancient Religion*, II (Cambridge 1925) 681–684.

Among Greek religious thinkers, both Pythagoras and Plato believed in metempsychosis of human souls into animal bodies as a punishment for wrongdoers. Pythagoras and Empedocles held in addition that plants too served as receptacles of souls in the chain of reincarnations.⁴¹ Empedocles in particular taught that all trees must be spared; he specifically forbade the chewing of laurel leaves because he regarded the laurel as the highest form of plant incarnations.⁴² Like Pythagoras before him, Empedocles also tabooed beans, conceivably because beans had souls.⁴³ The slaughter of animals was murder in the eyes of Empedocles, and the human souls of animal victims protested in vain when killed.⁴⁴

But Greek theories about metempsychosis and plant-souls are not a sufficient explanation for Mani's similar doctrine. By the third century A.D., knowledge of Pythagoras and Empedocles had become fragmentary and bookish; it is more than unlikely that the Aramaic-speaking Mani had access to early Greek philosophers. The prevailing philosophical mood was Neoplatonic, and its influence on Mani was pervasive.⁴⁵ But not every Platonist believed in transmigration of human souls into animal bodies, let alone plants.⁴⁶ Plant-souls lingered on in paradoxographic literature,⁴⁷ but they were no longer a live issue.⁴⁸ Two passages in Philostratus' *Life of Apollonius* confirm that interest in them was far from serious. When Apollonius discusses the Pythagorean doctrine of metempsychosis with an Indian Brahman, no reference is made to animal or plant incarnations.⁴⁹ But when he visits the Egyptian gymnosophists, their leader tries to outdo

41 According to Pythagoras as reported by Heraclides fr. 89 Wehrli, souls enter animals as well as plants. Empedocles even claimed to have been a bush (*θάμνος*) in an earlier existence (DK 31 B 117).

42 B 127 and 140.

43 B 141; on the Pythagorean taboo on eating beans ("eating beans is like eating the heads of one's parents"), and on bean blossoms as receptacles of souls before reincarnation, see W. Burkert, *Lore and Science in Ancient Pythagoreanism* (Cambridge, Mass. 1972) 183 f.

44 B 136–137. Compare the anecdote about Pythagoras and the beaten dog in Xenophanes (DK 21 B 7, with Burkert, *Lore and Science* 120 ff.).

45 For specific examples, see *ZPE* 32 (1978) 87 ff. nn. 187, 189, 191 and 194.

46 Albinus, Numenius and Plotinus believed in animal reincarnation, Porphyry and later Neoplatonists did not. See H. Dörrie, "Kontroversen um die Seelenwanderung im kaiserzeitlichen Platonismus," *Hermes* 85 (1957) 414–435; W. Theiler, *Forschungen zum Neuplatonismus* (Berlin 1966) 18 ff.

47 For instance the vine-maidens in Lucian *Ver. Hist.* 1.8.

48 Porphyry (*De abst.* 1.6) records Peripatetic and Stoic arguments against the plant-souls of Pythagoras and Empedocles. Aëtius *Plac.* 5.26 reviews philosophical opinion on the question of whether or not plants are sentient (H. Diels, *Doxographi Graeci* [Berlin 1879] 438 ff.).

49 *Vita Apoll.* 3.19–24. But Apollonius recognized a tame lion as a reincarnation of King Amasis (5.42).

the magical tricks of the Indian Brahmans by having an elm tree address Apollonius in an articulate and human voice.⁵⁰ The talking tree is, of course, a familiar manifestation of the tree-soul; but to Greeks of the second century A.D., it was hardly more than an amusing status symbol of exotic sages.

Mani's radical conception of metempsychosis is unlike anything that Greeks or Hellenized speakers of Aramaic believed in during Mani's lifetime. It must have come to Mani from elsewhere, most likely from India.⁵¹ Indian influence on early Greek theories of metempsychosis has often been surmised.⁵² A much stronger case can be made for Mani. His view of the fate of the soul is based on three fundamental assumptions that have close parallels in Indian thought. First, when an auditor's soul is reincarnated, its new dwelling place is determined by that person's moral conduct during his previous life. For instance, if he actively practised “piety” and supplied the elect with soul-carrying food such as melons and cucumbers, his soul would be reborn in the body of an elect or in the form of those fruits.⁵³ But those who had harvested plants were reborn as grass, barley, grain or vegetables, thus suffering the same fate which they had inflicted on others, whereas the killers of birds or mice were reborn as birds or mice.⁵⁴ Similarly, the Hindu *Laws of Manu* teach a “threefold course of transmigrations,” of saints into gods, of worldly men into human bodies, and of sinners into animals or plants.⁵⁵ Sinners are reborn strictly

50 *Vita Apoll.* 6.10 (ridiculed by Eusebius, *Contra Hieroclem* 30 and 38).

51 Hindu influence on Mani's doctrine of metempsychosis was first suggested by the great Islamic historian al-Biruni in his book on India of ca. A.D. 1030 (trans. E.C. Sachau [London 1911] pp. 54–55). Modern scholars tend to follow suit. See A.V.W. Jackson, “The Doctrine of Metempsychosis in Manichaeism,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 45 (1925) 246–268, a full presentation of the evidence available at the time. (But Jackson's notion of Mani's Indian sojourn as an “exile,” which goes back to al-Biruni, needs correction in the light of later discoveries.)

52 E.W. Hopkins, *The Religions of India* (Boston 1898) 559 ff.; K. von Fritz, *Gnomon* 40 (1968) 8 f.; M.L. West, *Early Greek Philosophy and the Orient* (Oxford 1971) 61–67 and 186 f.; more skeptical is W.K.C. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy* I (Cambridge 1971) 251 ff.

53 See above, n. 31. The survival of the elect depended on alms given by the auditors and called “pieties;” see *ZPE* 19 (1975) 11 n. 20.

54 *Acta Archelai* 10.1 ff.

55 *The Laws of Manu*, XII 58–81, trans. G. Bühler (*The Sacred Books of the East*, vol. 25 [Oxford 1886]). On the three classes of souls in Indian thought, which are often compared to the Gnostic division into *pneumatikoi*, *psychikoi* and *hylikoi*, see R.C. Zaehner, *Hinduism* (London 1962) 76 f. and 132 f. Mani too differentiated “three ways” toward salvation or punishment: the way of the elect led to immediate salvation; that of the auditor, to further incarnations; that of the sinner, to long vagaries in this world, and finally, hell. (*The Fihrist of an-Nadim*, trans. B. Dodge [New York and London 1970] II 795 f.).

according to the nature of their offenses: a thief of precious stones is reborn as a goldsmith; “for stealing grain a man becomes a rat, for stealing honey a stinging insect, for stealing milk a cow.”⁵⁶ The *Laws of Manu* record one plant incarnation: “the violator of a Guru’s bed enters a hundred times the forms of grasses, shrubs, and creepers.”⁵⁷ According to two of the oldest Upanishads, “inferior souls become rain, and then plants: rice or barley, sesame or beans, herbs or trees. With luck they are eaten by someone, metabolized into semen, and poured into a womb for rebirth.”⁵⁸ This brings us to the second point of contact. Whereas the followers of Pythagoras and Empedocles abstained from eating animals and certain plants in order to save the souls contained therein, the Manichaean elect was under strict orders to incorporate as many plant-souls as possible. The Indian doctrine of metempsychosis paraphrased above leads to the same conclusion.⁵⁹ Finally, the moon held a prominent place in Manichaean metempsychosis as a temporary receptacle of souls on their way to salvation or rebirth; the moon’s waxing and waning was explained as due to the coming and going of migrant souls.⁶⁰ Exactly the same role for the moon, and the same explanation of its phases, can be found in the *Kaushitaki Upanishad*.⁶¹

Unlike Porphyry, Mani did not have to rely on Bardaisan or similar indirect sources for his knowledge of India.⁶² Through his own missionaries in the provinces of Tūrān and Sind, he had direct access to Indian thought and customs. Shortly after his emergence as a new prophet in the spring of A.D. 240, Mani went to India and established a permanent mission in Dīb. We have his autobiographical report in the Coptic *Kephalaia*:

56 *Laws of Manu*, XII 61–62; for the general principle, see XII 81. Already Baur (above, n. 34) 319 compared the *lex talionis* in Manichaean metempsychosis with the similar emphasis on literal retribution in the *Laws of Manu*.

57 *Laws of Manu*, XII 58.

58 *Brhadāranyaka* and *Chāndogya Upanishads* as summarized by West (above, n. 52) 186. A similar transition of souls from “the five gods” through “the five kinds of plants and trees” to reincarnation in human bodies is mentioned in the Turkish Manichaean fragment T II D 173 (Jackson [above, n. 51] 264).

59 West (above, n. 52) 66 n. 4: “On the Indian theory it would help the souls if we ate as many beans as possible (as Aristoxenus [fr. 25 Wehrli] asserted that Pythagoras did).”

60 Cf. an-Nadim trans. Dodge (above, n. 55) II 782 f.; Flügel (above, n. 29) 224–232; Baur (above, n. 34) 307 ff.

61 *Kaushitaki Upanishad* 1.2–3 trans. R.C. Zaehner, *Hindu Scriptures* (London 1966) 149 f. (quoted and discussed by West [above, n. 52] 63 f. and 66 f.). According to this Upanishad, the souls which are rained down on earth “are born again here in different places (in a form) which accords with their (former) deeds and knowledge,—as worms or moths, fish or birds, tigers or lions, boars or rhinoceros, or as men or some other (animal).”

62 For Bardaisan on India, see *FGrHist* 719 F 1–2 (quoted by Porphyry).

At the end of the reign of king Ardashir, I came forward to preach the gospel. I made the passage to the land of the Indians; I preached the Hope of Life to them; I selected a most welcome selection there. But in the year in which King Ardashir died and in which Shapur, his son, became king and [succeeded him], I returned from the land of the Indians to the country of the Persians.⁶³

Mani stayed in the lower Indus valley for almost a year, from 241 to early 242,⁶⁴ long enough to get a first-hand impression of Indian religions. This experience clearly shaped his general conception of metempsychosis; more specifically, it seems to have inspired his vivid vision of trees as animate.

For the Hindu, plants and trees are potentially receptacles of souls. The *Laws of Manu*, which in essence date back to Mani's time, not only mention plant incarnations but also describe plants as sentient:

These (plants) which are surrounded by multiform Darkness, the result of their acts (in former existences), possess internal consciousness and experience pleasure and pain.⁶⁵

Careful not to harm the tree-souls, many Hindus are reluctant to prune certain trees or to remove dead branches from them.⁶⁶ Their scruple is well illustrated in a 19th century report about members of a Bengal tribe who would not fell the trees in their area unless Europeans were present:

On felling any large tree, one of the party was always prepared with a green sprig, which he ran and placed in the center of the stump when the tree fell, as a propitiation to the spirit which had been displaced so roughly, pleading at the same time the orders of the strangers for the work.⁶⁷

A similar plea of innocence was made by the Manichaean elect when eating bread. He would say,

63 *Keph.* 15.24–29; cf. 184.23–185.15.

64 Mani's return from India and the Manichaean mission to Dīb are mentioned in the Parthian fragment M 4575, edited by W. Sundermann, *Acta Orientalia Hungarica* 24 (1971) 79 ff.; cf. *Acta Orientalia* 36 (1974) 140.

65 *Laws of Manu*, I 49, trans. G. Bühler (above, n. 55). According to X 83–84, a Brahman must not engage in agriculture, because the plough would injure the earth and the animals living in the earth. The Manichaean elect must not hurt the earth either; compare *CMC* 96,18 – 97,10, where the earth complains when ploughed.

66 V.S. Agrawala, *Ancient Indian Folk Cults* (Varanasi 1970) 114–126 (on tree worship); W. Crooke, *The Popular Religion and Folk-Lore of Northern India* (2nd ed. 1896, rep. New Delhi 1968) 84 ff. (a description of “Tree and Serpent Worship,” written under the influence of Tylor and Frazer). I am much indebted to Professor Diana Eck for bibliographical references here and elsewhere in this section.

67 Crooke (preceding note) 87.

Neither did I reap you nor grind you nor knead you nor put you in the oven. No, someone else has made you and brought you to me. I eat you, but I am innocent.⁶⁸

Again, both apologies reflect the same Indian belief in the animateness of trees and plants, a belief which remained unchanged over the centuries.

Apart from Hinduism, Buddhism has left an even more prominent mark on Mani's religion. Bardaisan, who had conversed with Indian ambassadors on their way to Syria or Rome when Mani was between three and five years old, distinguished Hindu Brahmins from Buddhist holy men; Mani too must have met typical representatives of both religions.⁶⁹ The austere lifestyle of the Manichaean elect, which required total sexual continence and abstinence from fermented drinks, a vagrant life in extreme poverty, and the refusal to do manual work, is modeled on the discipline of the Buddhist monk.⁷⁰ Mani acknowledged his debt by including Buddha in the series of incarnations of the Divine Messenger who had preceded him.⁷¹

Although orthodox Buddhism does not recognize tree incarnations, rebirth as a *deva*, or god of secondary rank, is possible. Such *devas* would often take up residence in trees; Buddha himself, according to the *Jātakas*, was reborn as a tree-spirit some three dozen times.⁷² Tree-spirits who talk to men are a familiar feature of the *Jātakas*.⁷³ According to one particularly

68 *Acta Archelai* 10.6; *P. Ryl.* III 469.25 f. (The author of this papyrus letter of the late third century concludes from the "Apology to the Bread" that "the Manichaeans are filled with much madness [mania]."); Cyril of Jerusalem *Catech.* 6.32 (PG 33, 596 f.).

69 Bardaisan *FGrHist* 719 F 2 (*Brachmanes* versus *Samanaioi*, i.e. Sanskrit *śramana*, Middle Indian *samana*, "an ascetic"); see D.M. Long, *The Wisdom of Balahvar. A Christian Legend of the Buddha* (London 1957) 24 ff.

70 On Buddhist monks in antiquity, see A. Bareau in *Die Religionen Indiens. III: Buddhismus, Jnismus, Primitivvölker* (Stuttgart 1964) 54 ff. The Buddhist monk, like the Hindu Brahmin and the Manichaean elect (above, n. 65), observed *ahimsā* ("not causing damage") and was careful not to hurt any animal, not even the tiniest insect. For a stimulating discussion of Buddhist *ahimsā* and its Manichaean correlate as reflected in Buddhist and Manichaean confessions of sins see H.-J. Klimkeit, "Manichäische und buddhistische Beichtformeln aus Turfan. Beobachtungen zur Beziehung zwischen Gnosis und Mahāyāna," *Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte* 29 (1977) 193–228.

71 Mani's *Shābūhragān* as quoted by al-Biruni, *Chronology of Ancient Nations*, ed. C. E. Sachau, 207.14 ff.; *Keph.* 12.16 f. Cf. P. Alfarc, *Les écritures manichéennes* II (Paris 1919) 211 ff.

72 I read the *Jātakas* in J. Dutoit's German translation (*Jātakam. Das Buch der Erzählungen aus früheren Existenzen*, 7 vols. [Leipzig 1908–1921]) and in the English translation edited by E. B. Cowell (*The Jātaka or Stories of the Buddha's Former Births*, 5 vols. [Cambridge 1895–1907]).

73 See H. Oldenberg, *Die Religion des Veda* (4th ed. [Stuttgart and Berlin 1917]) 262 ff. Talking trees occur for instance in *Jātaka* no. 121 (Dutoit I 462 ff.; Cowell I 267 ff.); 475 (Dutoit IV 244 ff.; Cowell IV 129 ff.); 509 (Dutoit IV 571 ff.; Cowell IV 293 ff.). All three stories describe how trees inhabited by tree-spirits ward off threats to cut them down. Tylor, *Prim. Cult.* (above, n. 30) II 217 repeats a similar story without giving his source: "Buddha, it

relevant story,⁷⁴ a new pillar was needed for the king's palace, and a huge sacred tree in the royal park was selected to be cut down. The builders first decorated the tree and said:

On the seventh day from now we shall cut down this tree: it is the king's command so to cut it down. Let the deities who dwell in this tree go elsewhither, and not unto us be the blame.

Hearing this, the spirit who dwelt in the tree thought to himself:

These builders are determined to cut down this tree, and destroy my place of dwelling. Now my life only lasts as long as this my abiding place. And all the young sal trees that stand around this, where dwell the deities my kinsfolk, and they are many, will be destroyed. My own destruction does not touch me so near as the destruction of my children: therefore I must protect their lives.

The tree-spirit then visited the terrified king at midnight and asked him amid tears to spare him.

Though many a town and house they made, and many a king's dwelling,
Yet me they never did molest, to me no harm did bring:
Then even as they did worship pay, so worship thou, O King!

Unable to change the king's mind, the tree asked to be cut down piece by piece so that the other trees would not be crushed by his weight.

Since thou art bent to tear my body from me, cut me small,
And cut me piecemeal limb from limb, O King, or not at all.

The spirit's compassion moved the king to spare the tree and to worship it.

India has given Mani trees which talk and trees which feel pain, and in addition a radical doctrine of metempsychosis which furnished a theological explanation for the tree-soul and the tree-spirit. But the Indian tree stories do not explain everything. Unlike the palm trees and vegetables in the *CMC* the Indian trees do not bleed and do not threaten; nor is their quasi-human behavior designed to lend miraculous support to the religious authority of a divine man such as Mani. It remains to ask, therefore, whether or not Mani could have been under the influence of other and perhaps more western narrative traditions when he recast the Indian tales to suit his own missionary purposes.

is related, told a story of a tree crying out to the brahman carpenter who was going to cut it down, 'I have a word to say, hear my word!' but then the teacher goes on to explain that it was not really the tree that spoke, but a dewa dwelling in it." (This seems to be Tylor's free version of *Jātaka* no. 475.)

⁷⁴ *Jātaka* no. 465, trans. W.H.D. Rouse in Cowell IV (Cambridge 1901) 96-98. (=Dutoit IV 181-185).

V. Aretalogical Structure and Motifs

Two of the three miracle stories in the *CMC* follow the narrative pattern of Jewish and Christian aretalogies; the third story is different. Aretalogies are miracle stories told for missionary purposes. The type of aretalogy which influenced Manichaean storytellers is tripartite and describes (1) a supernatural occurrence taking place in the presence of a human witness, usually a nonbeliever; (2) its effect on the witness; and (3) an act of submission on the part of the witness by which he acknowledges the divine power manifest in the miracle. Seen in this light, the three stories reveal the following pattern:

	1. Miracle	2. Reaction	3. Recognition
<i>CMC</i> 6,1-8,14	(a) Talking Tree (b) All Trees Talk	(a) Fear (b) Amazement	(a) Prostration + Statement (b) Statement
<i>CMC</i> 9,1-10,15	Bleeding Vegetables	Surprise	Prostration
<i>CMC</i> 98,9-99,9	Talking Tree	—	—

Fear and amazement, the normal human reaction to divine intervention in aretalogies, are often followed by prostration before a divine agent present at the scene of the miracle; the combination of these two aretalogical motifs can be paralleled from pagan, Jewish and Christian texts.⁷⁵ Less conventional, however, is the miracle of the talking tree and the bleeding vegetables. Plants which shed blood when cut seem to be unknown to Jewish, Christian and Indian traditions; but they do occur in Greco-Roman miracle stories.⁷⁶

Talking trees are a common feature of folktale.⁷⁷ But unlike ordinary talking trees, the palm trees in the *CMC* do more than just talk: they threaten revenge.⁷⁸

CMC 7,2-5 ἐὰν τὸν μῶ[χθο]ν εἶρξῃς ἐξ ἡμῶν, [οὐχ] ἅμα τῷ φονεῖ ἀ[πο]λῇ.

CMC 99,4-9 μὴ ἐλθῃς τῷδε τῷ καιρῷ ἀποκλέψα[ι] μου τοὺς καρπούς. εἴ[ι] δὲ ἐλθοις, ἐκρίπτω σε ἐκ τοῦ ὕψους μου καὶ ἀποθανείσαι.

75 For parallels, see above, n. 18, and *ZPE* 19 (1975) 1 ff. nn. 16, 92, 100 and 103. Add 2 *Macc.* 3.24-36 (below, n. 93).

76 See F. Bömer on Ovid *Metam.* 8.762 (above, n. 2) and 9.344 f. (above, n. 10); R.D. Williams on Virgil *Aen.* 3.19 ff. (above, n. 2).

77 In the corpus of Aesopian fables, for instance, a nut tree which is pelted with stones complains that he produces an annual harvest of insults for himself (*fab.* 141).

78 For violators of sacred trees who are cursed by the tree-nymphs in Hellenistic myth, see *Metam.* 8.770 ff. (quoted at the very beginning of this article) and above, n. 6. The talking trees in the Buddhist *Jātakas* do not curse or punish (above, section IV); the tree-spirits who inhabit them resort to clever tricks, not threats, in order to save their trees.

From the Manichaean point of view, the “murderer” of a tree is certain to die because he will be reborn as a tree and suffer the same fate which he inflicted on the tree-soul.⁷⁹ Whereas the idea of punishment according to the principle of like for like is clearly Manichaean, the tree that threatens has literary precedent in Jewish tradition which may have influenced Mani. In the *Genesis Apocryphon* from Qumran Abraham has a dream. He dreamt that a cedar tree which was about to be felled was saved because a neighboring palm tree intervened on behalf of the cedar.

And on the night of our entry into Egypt, I, Abram, dreamt a dream; [and behold], I saw in my dream a cedar tree and a palm tree ... men came and they sought to cut down the cedar tree and to pull up its roots leaving the palm tree (standing) alone. But the palm tree cried out saying, “Do not cut this cedar tree, for cursed be he who shall fell [it].” And the cedar tree was spared because of the palm tree and [was] not felled.⁸⁰

Abraham interpreted his dream allegorically; its literary form is therefore the parable and not the aretalogy. But a Jewish aretalogy in which a talking tree is prominent can be found in the *Testament of Abraham*. The archangel Michael has been sent to the oak of Mamre to inform Abraham of his imminent death. Abraham, who does not recognize the divine messenger, invites him to his house.

As they went from the field to his house, by that pass there stood a cypress tree and at God’s command the tree cried out in human voice and said, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God who summons him to those who love him!” And Abraham concealed the mystery, for he thought that the Archistrategos had not heard the tree’s voice. When they came up to the house, they sat down in the court. When Isaac saw the angel’s face, he said to Sarah his mother, “My lady mother, the man who is sitting with my father Abraham is not a member of the race which inhabits the earth.” And Isaac ran up and bowed down to him and fell at the feet of the incorporeal one; and the incorporeal one blessed him and said ...⁸¹

The language of the first tree story in the *CMC* recalls a striking phrase in the *Testament of Abraham*. In both aretalogies, the miracle of the talking tree is called “a mystery,” which must be kept secret:

Test. of Abr. p. 79.20 ff. ἐκρυψεν δὲ Ἀβραὰμ τὸ μυστήριον, νομίσας ὅτι ὁ ἀρχιστράτηγος τὴν φωνὴν τοῦ δένδρου οὐκ ἤκουσεν.

79 Above, nn. 22–23 and 54–56.

80 *Genesis Apocryphon* col. XIX trans. G. Vermes, *The Dead Sea Scrolls in English* (Pelican Books 1962, 1968) 217. I owe this reference to Professor John Strugnell.

81 *The Testament of Abraham*, Recension A, 3, p. 79 James (Texts and Studies II 2 [Cambridge 1892]), trans. M.E. Stone (Texts and Translations 2, Pseudepigrapha Series 2, Society of Biblical Literature, 1972).

CMC 7,11 ff. οὐκ ἐγίνωσκον ὅτι τοῦτο τὸ ἀπόρητον μυστήριον παρὰ σοί ἐστιν.
8,10 ff. ἔλεγέν μοι· “φύλαξον τὸ μυστήριον τοῦτο, μηδενὶ ἐξείπης⁸² ...”

The thematic and stylistic similarities between these two texts are too close to be accidental, and raise tantalizing questions.⁸³ Was the author of the Manichaean miracle story familiar with a Syriac version of the *Testament of Abraham*? Or was the talking tree as an aretalogical motif more common in Jewish Haggadah than the evidence would suggest? In what sense is the power to make a tree talk a *μυστήριον* or *rāz*—is it a magician’s secret trick or the sign of the True Prophet?⁸⁴ Whatever the answer to these questions, there can be no doubt that the “mystery” of the talking tree in an aretalogical setting is found in Jewish tradition which influenced Mani.⁸⁵

VI. From Aretalogy to Paradoxography

The three tree stories in the *CMC* are clearly traditional. But they do not derive from a single source, or from one particular ethnic literature; their ancestry is mixed and international. We have seen that they follow the narrative pattern of Greek aretalogies, whereas individual motifs—the tree which threatens; the talking tree as a “mystery;” the talking tree as part of a formal aretalogy—can be traced back to Jewish narrative tradition, which in turn was conceivably influenced by pagan miracle stories of the Hellenistic period.⁸⁶ Pagan and Jewish practice of storytelling thus shaped the literary form of the Manichaean tree stories. But their form is merely the vehicle for the religious message which they convey. That message was heavily indebted to the Far East: during Mani’s lifetime, India was the only country where belief in the animateness of trees, edifying tales about trees which could talk, and a universal doctrine of metempsychosis coexisted side by side as similar manifestations of a peculiar religious attitude toward life which Mani adopted for his own religion.

82 Compare Mark 1.44 par. (after the cleansing of the leper) καὶ λέγει αὐτῷ· ὅρα μηδενὶ μηδὲν εἶπης ...

83 Compare in addition *Testament of Abraham* p. 79, 18 f. James ἐβόησεν τὸ δένδρον ἀνθρωπίνῃ φωνῇ, and *CMC* 10,8–11 (the vegetables) ἔκραζον δὲ καὶ ἀνθρωπεία φωνῇ διὰ τὰς πλήξεις αὐτῶν.

84 On *mysterion/rāz*, see M. Smith, *Clement of Alexandria and the Secret Gospel of Mark* (Cambridge, Mass. 1973) 178–183; on *σημεία*, see *ZPE* 19 (1975) 41 n. 76.

85 Not every talking tree counts as a miracle. Trees which proclaim the power of god in unison with the rest of his creation (e.g. mountains and animals) are not uncommon in Jewish literature (the non-canonical Psalm 151A found in the Eleventh Cave at Qumran is an early example; for a text of it, see J. Strugnell, *HTR* 59 [1966] 280); but their speech is something natural, not a miracle.

86 M. Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism* (London 1974) I 111 f.

The various components were traditional, but their combination was new and effective, and ensured wide circulation of the Manichaean tree stories. Non-Manichaean readers in general would find them incredible, and would hardly be able to understand their message; Christians doubtless reacted with ridicule.⁸⁷ But the pagan response to them was apparently more tolerant. It is a measure of their popularity that at least one pagan reader tried to imitate them.

Imbedded in a younger version of the so-called Alexander romance is a purported letter of Alexander the Great to his mother Olympias and to his teacher Aristotle, in which the conqueror describes all kinds of θαύματα observed by him during his eastern campaign. The epistolary form thus conceals a curious piece of paradoxographical literature. One of its highlights is the following tree story.⁸⁸

We retreated from there (i.e. the previous encampment) and came to a river. I ordered a camp made, and had the army disarm in the usual manner. There were trees standing in that river which would continuously grow from sunrise until noon but would get smaller during the afternoon until they disappeared completely. They had gum (literally “tears”) like Persian myrrh, and a most pleasant and delightful fragrance. I gave orders to cut (κόπτεσθαι) the trees and to collect (ἐκλέγεσθαι) their gum with sponges. But suddenly the collecting soldiers were whipped by an unseen demon. We could hear the noise as they were whipped and saw the blows (πληγὰς) come down on their backs, but we did not see who administered the blows. Then a voice was heard, telling us not to cut down or to collect (μηδὲ ἐκκόπτειν μηδὲ συλλέγειν⁸⁹), and adding, “Unless you stop doing this, the army will be struck speechless.”⁹⁰ I was in fear and instructed the soldiers not to cut down or to collect.

Anyone familiar with the Manichaean aretalogies in the *CMC* will immediately recognize the Manichaean bias in Alexander’s miracle story: a

87 Above, n. 68.

88 L. Bergson, *Der griechische Alexanderroman, Rezension β* (Stockholm 1965) II 36 p. 129 (Greek text); H. v. Thiel, *Leben und Taten Alexanders von Makedonien. Der griechische Alexanderroman nach der Handschrift L* (Darmstadt 1974) 106 ff. (Greek text and German trans.). Bergson dates this recension in the 5th or 6th century. The same story is found in another Greek version (γ, which depends on β), and in Latin (below, n. 90) and Syriac translations.

89 The wording is reminiscent of the language of Greek cult-laws. Cf. Sokolowski, *LSCG* (above, n. 4) 37.5 ff. (Attica, late 5th century B.C.) μη κόπτειν τὸ ἱερὸν τοῦ Ἀπόλλωνος μηδὲ φέρειν ξύλα μηδὲ κοῦρον μηδὲ φρύγανα μηδὲ φυλλόβολα ἐκ τοῦ ἱεροῦ. In *CMC* 6,4 f., Mani is instructed to collect wood (φέρειν ξύλα) but refuses.

90 In the Latin version, the voice warns that violators would die: *audivimus vocem de caelo allatam precipientem nobis, ut ne unus quidem incideret aliquid ex ipsis arboribus, quia, si factum fuerit, moriemini* (Leo p. 111.10 ff. ed. F. Pfister, *Der Alexanderroman des Archipresbyters Leo* [Heidelberg 1913]).

miraculous voice warns not to harm certain trees; this miracle scares a reluctant witness (here Alexander, in the *CMC* the baptist) who changes his mind and spares the trees. The tripartite structure of the story in combination with the emphasis on not hurting the trees is unmistakably Manichaean.⁹¹ But the actual miracle is different in Alexander's story: the mysterious voice which warns him does not seem to come from the trees themselves but from the unseen demon who intervenes on their behalf. This is a clear departure from the talking trees of the Manichaean tradition, and an important step towards transforming the original aretalogy into a secular miracle story. In addition, the flagellation of the violators, and speechlessness as a further punishment, are equally unknown to the Manichaean tree stories in their extant form. These two features do not seem to have a clear Manichaean reference;⁹² I suspect that they were added by the author of Alexander's letter. Is it coincidence that in the elaborate aretalogy of *2 Maccabees* the unbeliever Heliodorus is whipped by two angels before he loses his speech?⁹³

Alexander's miracle story has no religious motivation; it is thoroughly secular, and pure literary entertainment. Manichaean storytellers made trees come alive because they believed that trees, like all organic matter, contained the essence of life: Manichaean aretalogies were told *in maiorem divini luminis gloriam*. When this religious message was lost, the talking trees fell silent, and, in Juvenal's phrase, the *mendax aretalogus* eventually ousted the Manichaean storyteller. Thus a long tradition of pious storytelling came to an end.

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91 R. Merkelbach, *Die Quellen des griechischen Alexanderromans*, *Zetemata* 9 (2nd ed., Munich 1977) 69–70 saw that the tree miracle of Alexander's letter is modeled on Manichaean tree stories similar to those in the *CMC*.

92 Unless we assume that the gum-collectors receive their blows (πληγαί) in literal retaliation for their maltreatment of the trees (πλήττειν or πλήξις in Manichaean terminology; cf. above, n. 83).

93 *2 Macc.* 3.26 δύο προεφάνησαν νεανίαί . . . οἱ καὶ παραστάντες ἐξ ἑκατέρου μέρους ἐμαστίγουν αὐτὸν ἀδιαλείπτως, πολλὰς ἐπιρριπτοῦντες αὐτῷ πληγὰς. . . 3.29 καὶ ὁ μὲν διὰ τὴν θείαν ἐνέργειαν ἄφρωνος . . .